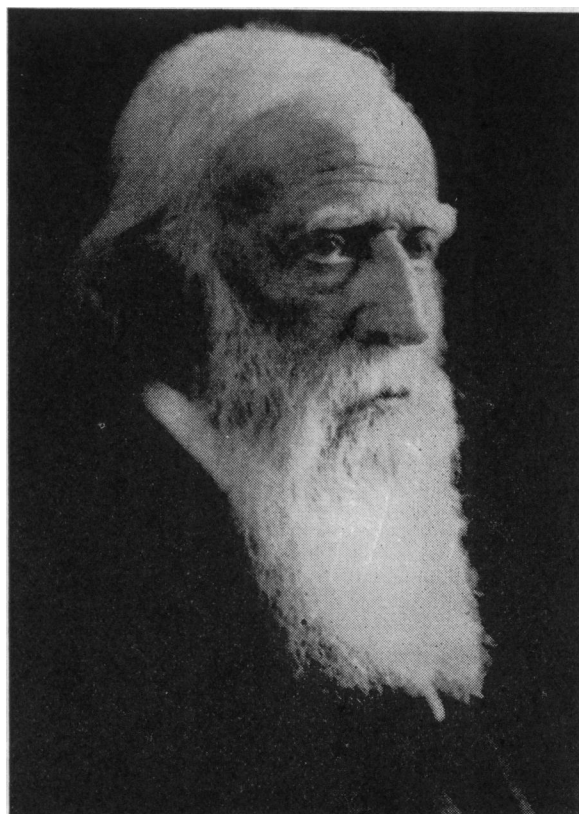


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THE LURE OF MEDICAL HISTORY†

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ASSOCIATION AND OF THE COLLEGE OF MEDICINE
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA,
CIVIC WORKER AND AUTHOR: SOME BIO-
GRAPHICAL NOTES ON A COLLEAGUE,
WHO, AT THE AGE OF 95, STILL
"CARRIES ON"*

By E. T. W.

PART I

IT is not given to every man, on attaining the ripe old age of four score and fifteen, as has been accorded Dr. Joseph Pomeroy Widney, the veteran physician and distinguished scholar of Los Angeles—who on December 26, 1935, celebrated his ninety-fifth birthday—to look back with modest complacency on a life so well spent and eminently fruitful.

THE DAYS OF YOUTH

Born, in 1841, among the forests of Miami County, Ohio, and in sight—as he himself expresses it—of clusters of Indian wigwams, the son

† A Twenty-five Years Ago column, made up of excerpts from the official journal of the California Medical Association of twenty-five years ago, is printed in each issue of CALIFORNIA AND WESTERN MEDICINE. The column is one of the regular features of the Miscellany department, and its page number will be found on the front cover.

*The Council of the California Medical Association recently authorized the editor to arrange for the sketch presented, the result of a pleasant interview. See also page 251.

of Wilson and Arabella (Maclay) Widney, of sturdy Scotch and Huguenot ancestry, Joseph Widney inherited the very qualities needed to rise out of, and beyond his almost primeval environment. He pursued the required courses of the Piqua high school, and from there entered Miami University at Oxford, Ohio, where his encounter with the academic authorities foreshadowed a mind inclined to think and act for itself. He had read history, he told the president, and had already taught trigonometry, and all that he wanted was more Latin and Greek. He commenced college work as a sophomore, only to leave the classic halls at the end of five months, in voluntary response to a call to arms in defense of his war-torn country.

After shouldering musket and rifle in the field young Widney entered the hospital service on the steamers of the Ohio and the Mississippi. Then, with failing health in the late autumn of 1862, he came to California.

GRADUATION FROM TOLAND MEDICAL COLLEGE IN 1866

Arriving at San Francisco, he continued the literary courses begun at Miami, in studies pursued at the University of the Pacific, where he was made a Master of Arts; and after that he matriculated in Toland Medical College, later ab-

* This is a photograph of Dr. Joseph P. Widney, taken in the year 1936, and shows his appearance at the age of ninety-five.

sorbed by the medical department of the University of California, from which institution in 1866 he received the M. D. degree. Looking backward to those postgraduate days, he recalls, as among his instructors, the surgeon, Dr. Levi Cooper Lane, who founded Cooper Medical College in honor of his uncle, Dr. Elias Samuel Cooper. He also remembers Dr. Henry Gibbons, professor of *Materia Medica*, of good old Quaker stock and marked manners as a gentleman; an earnest temperance lecturer, with a peculiar, dry humor, who, as president of both the San Francisco and the California State Medical societies, reached eminence. Another lecturer brought to mind was Dr. H. H. Toland, a South Carolinian, "a good, practical surgeon, a man of great capacity who made money and made it rapidly, and built, at his own expense, Toland College." A daughter of Doctor Toland married Andrew Glassell, a leading attorney of Los Angeles.

SERVICE IN THE UNITED STATES ARMY: SURGEON
IN DRUM BARRACKS, WILMINGTON, AND IN
THE ARIZONA-APACHE CAMPAIGN

Returning to military duty in the United States Army, when General David McMurtree Gregg, commanding the Department of the Pacific, came down the Coast from San Francisco with recruits on the old side-wheeler, the steamer *Orizaba*, Doctor Widney, after a month at Drum Barracks, at Wilmington, started for Arizona in charge of some hundreds of recruits and saw two years of arduous service in Arizona in the campaigns of 1867 and 1868 against the Apaches. The unadorned narratives of his adventures during the rough formative periods of that corner of the Southwest might well afford fireside entertainment.

"Leaving Drum Barracks and San Pedro," he says, "we started out for Arizona through San Geronio Pass—I on horse, but most of the recruits on foot. From there we crossed the Colorado Desert, and went into camp somewhere below Palm Springs. By the eighth of March we were crossing the desert, and such was the sudden change that two men dropped in their tracks, overcome by the heat. Then we started to climb Granite Wash, some sixteen miles of upgrade, and when we were about half way, a thunder storm broke in the mountains. Lieutenant McConnihe brought the troops to a halt, and gave orders to pitch camp. I immediately objected to the site, considering it unsafe; but the lieutenant replied that, as the wagonmaster had made the selection, the decision would stand. A short time, however, after the men had unhitched the wagons, we heard a roaring in the mountains, and I at once knew what it portended; and in a moment, seeing the waters rushing down, with a ten-foot head, I shouted to the men to jump for the rocks as quickly as they could and save their lives. The water actually seemed to leap from rock to rock, bounding and rebounding eight to ten feet high before hitting the earth again. About half of our wagon-train was swept away, a severe loss since



JOSEPH P. WIDNEY, M.D.
Reproduction of a photograph taken between
1870 and 1880.

many of the wagons were loaded with barley, which, scattered by the flood, caused a sixteen-mile field of barley to spring up. Moving on to the territory due north, I helped to reestablish Date Creek Post. I was next, for some months, on duty scouting over the northern part of the territory.

"I then received orders to take charge as surgeon at Apache Pass in the southern part of the territory. In company with a small band of officers likewise ordered to the south, and with an escort of soldiers for greater safety in the Indian country, we crossed fifty miles of desert without water, traveling all night because of the heat. Passing on through Tucson, I went to my own post at Apache Pass, over a hundred miles east of that town. At that place I remained on duty for a year, and built the Post hospital; and that year was also spent, for the most part, on scouting duty. Lieutenant Carroll, commander of the Post, was killed by the Indians in one of their raids. I carried his dead body back to the Post strapped across my saddle. A civilian, killed with him, was buried by his side. In our last scouting trip, we were without water for twenty-four hours, traveling through the grass fires which the Indians had set to hide their trail. The heat was intense and the men were becoming exhausted. Dismounting, I put them, by turns, on my horse, riding, while I myself went along half the day on foot, carrying a heavy rifle, and having an army revolver and a cartridge box buckled around me. The only thing that saved our whole command from perishing was the accidental discovery

of water, of which the guide had not known, at a small stream in the mountains.

"On this scouting trip we buried the dead bodies of two men killed by the Indians several days before. They had been put to death by torture, walking in a circle until they had worn a pathway. I had the men, by details, look at the dead bodies, telling them, 'That is what you may expect if ever you surrender; so fight to the last, and make them kill you.' The men dug a shallow grave with their bayonets, rolled the putrid bodies in, and covering them with stones to keep away the coyotes, we then left them to their last sleep away up in the Chiricahua Mountains, where they gave their lives to make safe the peaceful homes which now lie in the valleys below."

ENTRANCE INTO PRIVATE MEDICAL PRACTICE IN LOS ANGELES IN 1868

In 1868, after reporting at headquarters in San Francisco, Doctor Widney left the army and settled for private practice in Los Angeles, where he has since remained, a decidedly influential force in both the development and the upbuilding of the community. He opened his first office in the old Temple Block, now torn down. At that time his professional associates included the esteemed Dr. John Strother Griffin, brother-in-law of General Albert Sidney Johnston, a surgeon in the old army of Mexican War times, and once half-owner of the site of Pasadena; Dr. Richard Den, a true Irish gentleman of dignified mien and striking personal appearance, especially when on horseback; Dr. William Francis Edgar, also a surgeon of the old army before and during the Civil War, who had seen much service against the Indians and became, in his will, a benefactor of the Historical Society of Southern California; and Dr. Pigne Dupuytran, who was in charge of the French Hospital. Doctor Widney enjoyed his share of a growing local patronage, the citizens of Los Angeles learning, little by little, that it was not always necessary, as in earlier days, to go north for expert medical care. Even when Los Angeles had some 5,000 souls, San Francisco boasted of more specialists, such men as Doctors Cooper, H. H. Toland and John James Sawyer having an especially enviable reputation. Occasionally, a distinguished traveler came the doctor's way; as, General William Tecumseh Sherman, who once passed through en route to the East, a little worried as to the state of his lungs, and who, Union veteran though he was, soon sent for Doctor Griffin, of Confederate sympathies. The latter called in Doctor Widney for consultation; but the two M. D.'s decided that General Sherman had no cause for alarm. Less distinguished visitors than the hero of "The march through Georgia" also came to Los Angeles; as Tuburcio Vasquez, the notorious bandido, who proved one of the most suave and courteous of prisoners, bowing and throwing kisses to the ladies, in turn storming the jail doors, and bringing him flowers. His demeanor, indeed, was such that "Billy" Rowland, then sheriff, was inclined to afford him some



JOSEPH P. WIDNEY, M.D.
A photograph taken between 1880 and 1890.

leniency, particularly as Vasquez was wounded; but Doctor Widney, when called in to see the prisoner, said: "Billy, this man is perfectly able to jump on a horse and ride fifty miles without stopping, and I think that, instead of giving him any privileges, he should be chained, and fast, to the bedposts." Rowland followed the doctor's common sense suggestion, and added weights to the handcuffs, which may explain, in part, why at last this bandit, long the terror of the country, was actually executed.

FOUNDING OF THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION, ON JANUARY 31, 1871*

Three years or less after he had established himself in private practice, Doctor Widney issued a call for the founding of the Los Angeles Medi-

* Editor's Note.—The exact date of founding of the Los Angeles County Medical Association is January 31, 1871; no authentic record of any medical society existing previously in Los Angeles having been found. Years ago—that is, in 1911—while compiling a "History of the Medical Profession of Southern California," our attention was called, by an officer of the Pioneer Society of Los Angeles, to a fee table of 1850, found in the Court House by Sheriff William R. Rowland (the same genial, doughty "Billy" mentioned by Doctor Widney in his reminiscences of the bandit Vasquez), and this list of fees was printed on page 8 of the book. Between the year of the fee table, however, and that of the Society's founding, is too long a period to permit even poetic imagination to affirm that 1850, the time of agreement by the four pioneer Los Angeles physicians—A. U. Blackburn, Charles R. Cullen, J. W. Dodge, and W. B. Osbourn—constituted the founding date of the Los Angeles County Medical Association!

The oldest medical society of the State, according to California Medical Association records, is the San Francisco Medical Society, which was organized on January 1, 1868, and the second oldest society is the Sacramento Society for Medical Improvement, established on March 17, 1868, some three months after the San Francisco association was formed. The Los Angeles County Medical Association followed on January 25, 1871. Early in 1871 the Alameda County Medical Society was organized; four years later, in May, came the San Joaquin County Medical

cal Association, having satisfied himself of the need of just such an organization, and that, just then, there was nothing similar in the southern part of the State. He brought together, on January 31, 1871, some seven physicians who soon adopted a constitution and by-laws, and chose for their president, Dr. John S. Griffin, patriarch of the Los Angeles medical profession.[†] At the next meeting, on February 7, Doctor Widney was notably active—reporting an amendment to the constitution concerning the status of honorary members, and helping to formulate a bill, adopted March 7, fixing fees to be authorized. In 1877, the subject of our sketch was elected president of the Society, and for six terms he acted as one of the censors, the successive minutes—as of other organizations with which he became identified—showing his eager and untiring participation in all the constructive work that had to be done.

SERVICE AS A PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER

As early as February 1, 1876, Doctor Widney called the attention of the Society to the unsanitary condition of the city, and the need of a board of health and health officer, the minutes recording, "Upon motion of J. P. Widney, a committee of three was appointed to draw up a communication to the City Council urging the importance of establishing a Board of Health, and the appointment of a Health Officer; when the President appointed as said committee J. P. Widney, H. S. Orme and J. H. McKee." Somewhat naturally, Doctor Widney in time served on the Los Angeles Board of Health, when Dr. J. B. Winston was health officer, the latter having succeeded Dr. Walter Lindley. Doctor Widney was also for several years a member of the California State Board of Health.

Society, and on September 5 of the following year the Santa Clara County Medical Society began its existence.

The Medical Society of the State of California, first organized in 1856, recessed in 1862, and was reorganized in 1870. In this connection, as an interesting item shedding light upon the distribution of population and the state of organized medicine in California, is the fact that the first physician residing south of the Tehachapi ever to be elected president of the Medical Society of the State of California was the late Henry S. Orme of Los Angeles, who was installed in 1879; he was followed in 1890 by the late Dr. Walter Lindley of Los Angeles. Six years later the late Dr. William LeMoine Wills of Los Angeles headed the Society, to be succeeded in 1898 by the late Dr. Cephus L. Bard of Ventura. In 1905 the late Frank I. Adams of Oakland was president; while the only other presidential colleague from Alameda County prior to Doctor Adam's election was the late Dr. W. P. Gibbons in 1886.

[†] An excerpt from page 32 of "The Medical Profession in Southern California," printed in 1910, gives further information concerning the founding of the Los Angeles County Medical Association:

"A brief sketch, written by the secretary of the Society in 1891, Dr. H. Bert. Ellis, presents a summary which can be used as an introduction to the detailed historical sketch of the Los Angeles County Medical Association.

"The Los Angeles County Medical Association was organized January 31, 1891.

"A preliminary meeting had been held at the office of Dr. H. S. Orme on January 25, at which six physicians were present, and at which time Doctors Orme and Hayes were appointed a committee to draft a constitution and by-laws.

"On January 31, at the office of Doctors Griffin and Widney, this committee reported. Seven physicians were present and organized themselves, adopted a constitution and by-laws, and adjourned to meet at the same place on February 7. The seven charter members who signed the constitution on the evening of February 7, 1891, were: John S. Griffin, Henry S. Orme, Joseph P. Widney, William F. Edgar, R. T. Hayes, L. L. Door, and T. H. Rose."

STUDIES ON CLIMATOLOGY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

These studies of sanitation and similar subjects bearing on public health turned the Doctor's attention to climatology, and he gives us an interesting paragraph or two about the results:

"When I was stationed as post surgeon at Apache Pass, Arizona, in 1867-68, I made monthly reports to the War Department upon the climate of that section. Indeed, in nearly a year of active campaign duty which covered almost the entire territory, I reported all the facts that could be noted without the use of instruments. These reports included data as to sunshine or occasional clouds, variations of temperature, wind and rain storms, mountain floods and water supply. On my return to California and Los Angeles, I resumed my studies of weather and climate, and their effect upon health. I kept in close touch with both the United States Signal Service, after its establishment here, and private observers who often were among the most enthusiastic. And I published in the city press and magazines many articles, and issued numerous pamphlets, seeking to direct the attention of the public to more thought upon these subjects, to me, more than ever, matters of importance. I gave expression, too, to many theories and convictions in the introductory chapters of 'California of the South,' a volume first published in 1888, and reissued in 1896 when, with Dr. Walter Lindley, I discussed the physical geography, the climate, mineral springs and health resorts of Southern California, and helped with him to provide one of the earliest guidebooks to this region."

ADVOCACY OF FLOODING OF THE COLORADO DESERT

Growing out, also, of these general studies of climatology, were efforts made by Doctor Widney for the flooding of the Colorado Desert—first suggested by him in an article published in the *Overland Monthly* in 1873—and the setting aside of great forest areas for the benefit, in a conservation of resources, of generations to come. The flooding of the desert, according to Doctor Widney, is now going on through seepage from irrigation in the Imperial Valley; hence, the Salton Sea, which is steadily increasing in size, year by year, is already having a material influence upon the climate of the Lower Colorado Basin. In first proposing to set aside the three forest reservations, Doctor Widney gave impetus to the great work of securing the present water supply for Los Angeles. Laying his arguments before the proper authorities, he suggested making one reservation of the forests north of Los Angeles and toward Santa Barbara, another in the mountains eastward about San Bernardino, and a third in the mountain region about San Diego; and this personal effort on behalf of posterity was handsomely acknowledged when the Government declared reserved the very areas in the Widney recommendation.

(To be concluded)